

50 Years of Game Capture

(Part 2)

by Louis Geldenhuys and Mark Jago

Time moves on, Namibia embraces her wildlife with renewed vigor as a natural resource to be used sustainably for the betterment of all Namibians.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) embarks on a series of large-scale reintroductions and supplementations of game into former ranges through the ever-growing highly successful conservancy programme, which empowers rural communities to become resource managers through not only deriving benefits from game but also assisting Government in achieving significant national biodiversity goals.

Partners

Over the years a number of partners have collaborated with Government to facilitate these endeavours: World Wildlife Fund, the European Union's Enhancing Wildlife-based Economy in Rural Areas (EWERAP), Integrated Community-based Ecosystems Management (ICEMA) and the French Fund for World Environment (FFEM), and the USA -

supported Millennium Challenge Account.

Parallel to this, MET sets in motion a country-wide programme designed to assist newly emerging Namibian farmers to access the benefits of game through the Wildlife Breeding Stock Loan Scheme.

Concomitantly the tourism and hunting industries continue to flourish, on the back of which the Namibian game industry grows at an exponential rate with certain high-value species being bought and sold for incredible prices.

As a result of all this activity the need to capture, care and translocate wildlife in Namibia continues to grow. The remarkable amount of knowledge gained and capture techniques developed by the experts in the field of previous years is built on by an ever-growing number of individuals and capture teams encompassing an array of different skill sets.

The game capture course is formalised and becomes essential for anyone wishing to learn the art, while the wildlife veterinarian must become familiar with the new array of medical drug

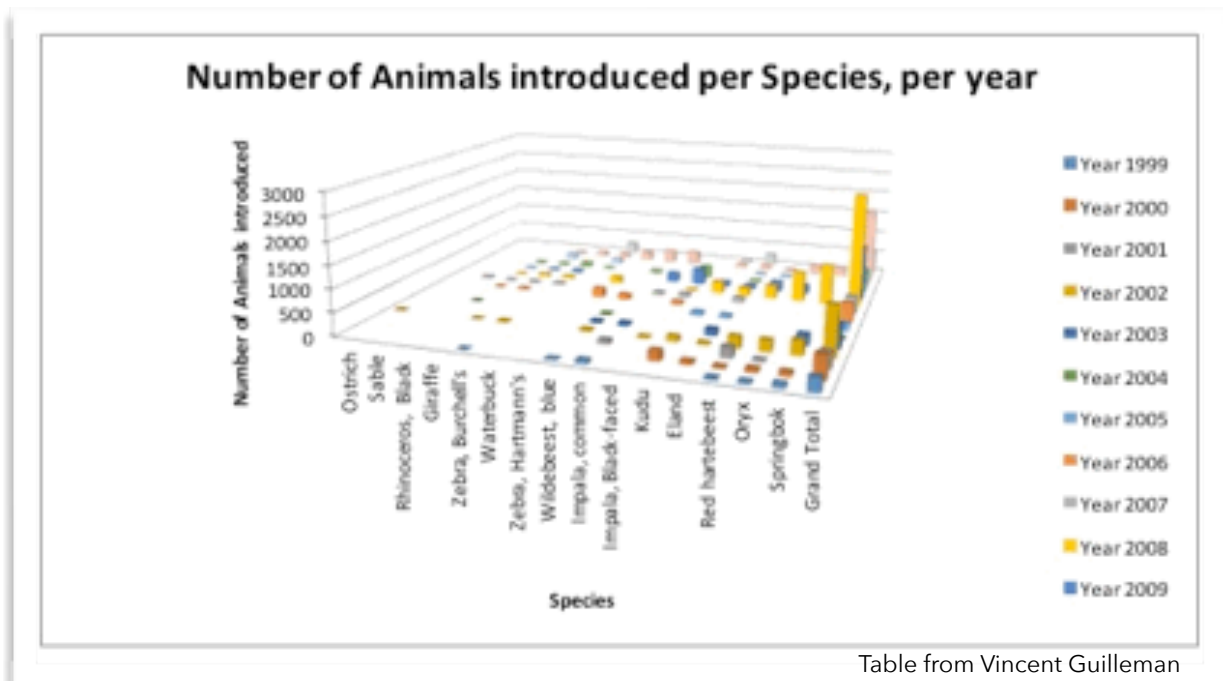


Table from Vincent Guilleman

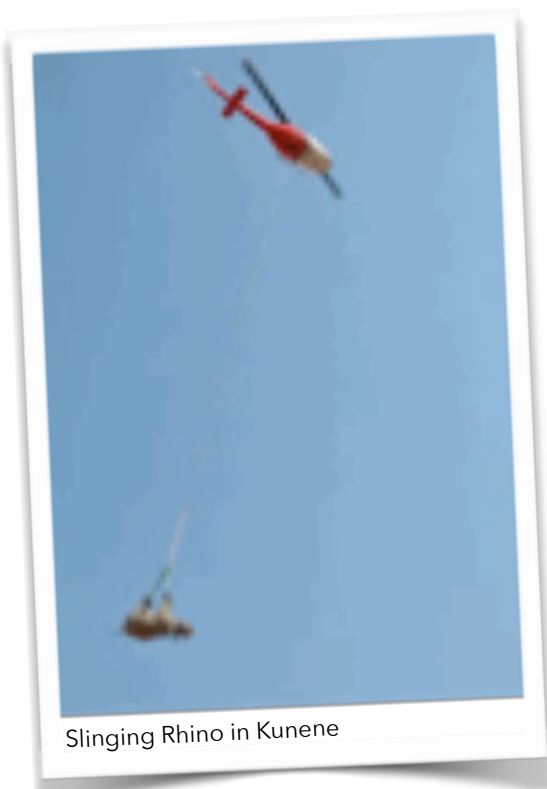
combinations used to immobilise, anaesthetise, tranquillise, sedate and otherwise treat the wild animal.

However, the basics remain the same, with those responsible for the capture of wildlife using a mixture of physical capture of larger numbers through the plastic boma, the drop net, the net gun and others, and chemical immobilisation of the individual by remote injection using a dart fired from a dart gun.

Capture and translocation highlights

The capture and translocation highlights in which the MET has been involved during the last 20 years have been noteworthy.

Between 1999 and 2013 a total of 10,568 animals (Table) of 15 different species were translocated to 38 conservancies by MET and private capture units under the auspices of MET and the with the assistance of partner funding.



Slinging Rhino in Kunene

'Slinging' Rhino

One of the more unusual translocations included the lifting and slinging of a number of black rhino under a Super Huey helicopter in the Kunene

Region in 2010. Due to the rugged and highly remote area in which the rhino were caught and moved, traditional methods making use of ground retrieval could not be used.

However the helicopter, with a 1500 kg slinging capacity, was able to lift an immobilised rhino upside down and fly for up to 20 minutes that allowed the rhino to be moved over mountains and out of and into otherwise completely inaccessible areas. The operation involved the coordination of a large number of people and equipment and resulted in stakeholders at all levels being involved in the successful management and conservation of the black rhino in Namibia.

Rhino Custodianship Programme

The highly successful Black Rhino Custodianship Program continues with recipients coming from both conservancies and private farmers; today there are in excess of 30 custodians. The management of these satellite populations as part of the larger metapopulation involves annually the capture of a large number of black rhino on both custodian land and within Namibia's protected areas. Some of these rhino will be translocated directly from "veld to veld", while a smaller number will be required to undergo a six-week boma adaptation period so that they become familiar with different foods and are habituated to the point where they can be translocated over greater distances.

Some of the rhinos will be captured for identification purposes, have samples and biometric measurements taken and, additionally today, a number will be dehorned in order to reduce the risk of poaching.



Crate training rhino going to Cuba

The capture, care and translocation of rhino has advanced over the years to the point where today they can be moved large distances, and in 2007 MET was involved in an international three-way exchange program whereby *Diceros bicornis bicornis* were moved from Namibia to South Africa, which in turn moved *Diceros bicornis minor* from South Africa to Zambia, which for their part agreed to provide an assortment of game to Namibia including puku, lechwe, sitatunga and oribi.

Twelve black rhino were caught in Namibia and placed in specially designed bomas on Waterberg, which included overhead heating and facilities to "crate train" them to the point where they could be loaded into rhino crates and driven for 48 hours to their destination in SA. This boma period required a dedicated team to cut browse, feed and clean twice daily, and work with the rhino for at least 12 hours a day.

Flying to Cuba

Both black and white rhino were part of a consignment of 144 animals of 22 species of wildlife that were caught and transported to Cuba in two 14-hour flights in a Boeing (Jumbo!) 747 for a distance of 11, 888km in 2012 and 2013. This project was one of the largest of its kind, involving a variety of species including carnivores, antelope, buffalo, birds, rhino and elephant, taking over three years to plan and two years to execute.

It involved a large number of people from both Namibia and Cuba, private and state; the construction of two purpose built vector-free quarantine facilities; the testing of nearly 200 animals for 32 different diseases and two journeys, each of 48 hours

duration door-to-door. There were no casualties during the translocations with all animals arriving safe and sound.

Mindful of the essential components of conservation in which Namibia's natural resources are utilised to maximise both their ecological as well as economical value,

MET's biannual auctions of high value species have continued with the sale of a number of species including black rhino, buffalo, roan and sable. The proceeds of these auctions have continued to go into the highly successful Game Product Trust Fund.

Waterberg's specific-pathogen-free population of buffalo has generated a large amount of funds that have been used in turn to further conservation goals.

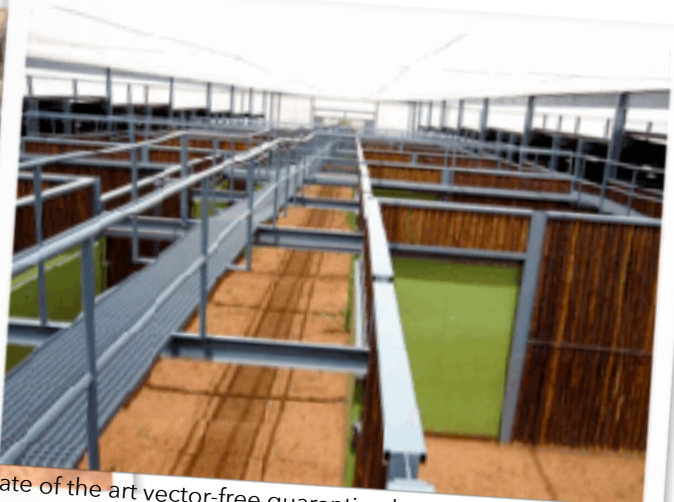
A question often asked is what have been the most significant advances in game capture over recent time. Naturally there have been many. Perhaps one of the most valuable has been the reduction in losses of game caught and moved, which goes hand-in-hand with a critical improvement in animal welfare.

A combination of refined capture techniques, holding facilities and transport systems - together with an increase in our understanding of a number of veterinary medicines used to immobilise and sedate animals - has been critical. In particular the use of the Long Acting Neuroleptics, a group of drugs originally used in human medicine, are today being used very successfully to reduce the stress under which wild animals find themselves during transport and captivity.

There is of course still much to learn, and so the next fifty years are going to be very exciting!



Auction Buffalo 2014



State of the art vector-free quarantine bomas on Waterberg



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From the Editor's Desk

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 committee members
 listed below and sign
 up today!

This World Ranger Day (31 July, 2017) we celebrate the inspirational work of conservationists present and past.

We start with an update on the progress of Conservation Pioneers of Namibia, the book that Peter Bridgeford has spent many years of painstaking work to compile. It's expected to reach the shelves later this year. We have a sneak preview of content, with a story by Roelf de Bruine about a helicopter lost in the desert - long before the days of GPS, cellular phones and digital tracking methods. Louis Geldenhuys and Mark Jago wrap up 50 years of Game Capture, noting some of the remarkable achievements - some of them 'world firsts'.

For nearly 25 years, Basil Pather has worked tirelessly to save the unique Beachwood Mangrove Nature Reserve (Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife) in the heart of Durban. Having started his career as a senior ranger in Swakopmund during the early 1990s, he has remained a dedicated officer who doesn't let the lack of resources and finances weigh him down. He has rallied together a voluntary team of Honorary Rangers who champion environmental education, construction and maintenance, research and law enforcement. We invited him to highlight some of the work done and share some insights into the system. There's no news of the system being resurrected in Namibia, but we hope that Basil's work can inspire some debate on the Namibian situation.

Nekulilo Uunona reports on how workhand Tulikokule Hilja Niipele, injured by a rhino cow during a patrol at Waterberg Plateau Park last year, has become an active anti-poaching campaigner, while GRAA Chairperson Mark Paxton shares his recent involvement in the successful cross-border arrest of alleged crocodile poachers. We pay tribute to conservation legend Albi Bruckner, catch up on activities at Shinganda Wildlife Wilderness in Zambia and end with an update of environmental news that made the headlines in July.

Last, take a moment today to pay tribute to the men and women who are actively working as rangers, and, if you have retired from the profession, reflect on some of your most treasured moments in the veld.

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